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Lark

Grenville Taggard

Henry Salomé Clarke

Lento

Ah

Lark, from great dark a- rise! O- Lark of light, O, Light-ness like a
 spark, Shout ears and stun our eyes, Sing-ing the day-rise the day-rise
 the great-day-rise O be-liev-er, Re-joic-en, say Be-fore
 Ev-i-dence of Day- The Sun is Ris-en Where No sun is, come
 sud-ly in the air, Let ear and eye pre-pare To see and hear
 tru-ly to see and hear, To rear thy three-fold wel-come
 in the air, To see all dar-tle of ter-ry de spars- To see what none may see now
 sing-er, sing-er fair- so fair, O- lark a- lent, O- lark a-
 live O love-ly, love ly chant-ing ar-row- lark, Sprung like an ar-row from the bow of
 dark O lark a- rise, sing the day-rise The great-day-rise Ah-

Collected Poems

1918 – 1938

By

Genevieve Taggard



Harper & Brothers *Publishers*

NEW YORK AND LONDON

COLLECTED POEMS 1918-1938

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SECOND EDITION

G - O

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. *an aboriginal vigor*

—H D THOREAU

there lives the dearest freshness deep down things

—G M HOPKINS

. *energy is eternal delight*

—WILLIAM BLAKE

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1

LISTEN to the voice in the cloud
Listen to the loud
And suddenly ended
Outcry
It is my
Voice in the high
Moon-running ruin of the sky

Listen, in cities the rush
Of people on pavements, and hush,
Tip-toe, the step of the spy.

Listen we pour the new span,
We perfect the arc Listen
To the voice in the cloud
Listen to the loud
Voice my warning voice and hark,
In the dark, the cry

New York City
1938

Try Tropic

(For a Sick Generation)

TRY tropic for your balm,
Try storm,
And after storm, calm
Try snow of heaven, heavy, soft and slow,
Brilliant and warm
Nothing will help, and nothing do much harm

Drink iron from rare springs, follow the sun,
Go far
To get the beam of some medicinal star,
Or in your anguish run
The gauntlet of all zones to an ultimate one
Fever and chill
Punish you still,
Earth has no zone to work against your ill

Burn in the jewelled desert with the toad
Catch lace
Of evening mist across your haunted face,
Or walk in upper air, the slanted road
It will not lift that load,
Nor will large seas undo your subtle ill

Nothing can cure and nothing kill
What ails your eyes, what cuts your pulse in two
And not kill you.

New York City
1928

The Trance

Dedicated to Ursula Rossman

IN MIDDLE life, that time of highest light,
When under every object clings its shade
I fell into an apathy of sight
From looking at the pattern overlaid

Across the earth, the dazzling bright and dark
Complexity, the strange elaborate braid,
The tattoo, good and evil, heavy mark
Like that long twist the Snake in Eden made

When he through pure pale leaves ran mazy lines.
The diamond back of evil in all things
Copies that mark, its multiple designs,
And still he falls along our earth in rings

Such webby tangle in all earth's array'
My apathy like any shadow clings
To all the happy objects of high day
Before the snake the bird shuts down its wings

Only declining sun or hazy eye
Can help indelible lines to shift or fade
Then can the rigid bird come to and fly
Into the wave of the oncoming shade

Himself, he has no shadow—belly tight
He skims our land and under him no shade.
It is the sun, the very bliss of light
That gives the shadow out of dazzle made

His coils are melancholy Heavy snake
Crawl off a little way a little while!
When shall I from this reptile slumber wake,
Move, salute the sun and smile.

Bennington, Vermont
1933

To the Powers of Desolation

O MORTAL boy we cannot stop
The leak in that great wall where death seeps in
With hands or bodies, frantic mouths, or sleep
Over the wall, over the wall's top
I have seen rising waters, waters of desolation.

From my despair bibles are written, children begotten;
Women open the wrong doors, men lie in ditches retching,—
The horrible bright eyes of insanity fix on a blue fly,
Focus, enlarge Dear mortal, escape
You cannot. I hear the drip of eternity above the quiet buzz
 of your sleep
The waters are pouring, boiling over the wall, at the door
Where murder is under way they fall knocking on silence.
Go, that we may not hunger any more,
Or repeat again the wild ritual, the pang;
I will lie face downward
In an oblivion of waters,
Weeping in no way except in these words,
Caring then for nothing; for the blue wasp in the dabble
 of blood, perhaps, only,
While the slow waters pour.

Mallorca

1931

Image

*Dedicated to the heroic memory of Christopher Caudwell,
author of Illusion and Reality, killed in action fighting with
the government forces at Madrid, 1937*

MASK-FACE of old grief, death-mask, massive
Visage uttering Joy, Joy sputtering, glorious oracle!
Joy, red on tongue with wind on frozen forehead,
Mouth open, Joy just-spoken, grief just-broken;
Clarion throat eloquent, quenching cries, eyes
Wide, soul of Hallelujah, Ah,
Fury of song and drum and gong, fury
For the color of flags snapping on broomsticks,
Screw it in chromium on motor-cars,
Put the medallion on money,
Let it shake large and quiet in star-water

Bennington, Vermont

1933

Morning Rising

YOUR eyes differ with mine One look and away they glance
We lie on our arms in the little meadow
We pluck the grass. We scrutinize the shadow.
We admit by cold degrees our difference

My definitions are passionate Never
Did reality cut such a scimitar shadow
In quietness, never more splendid the meadow
This grass is the edge and color of forever

But you caught in quagmire cold Poor cheer, sweet friend.
I can taste the yellow of your moody thinking,
Can feel the eclipse of your polar star, quick-sinking.
When I speak, you shrug . . . and hear me to the end

So sore you are, so sure of my despising,
So certain of my scorn, and darkly thinking
"All's wrong All's lost Everything is sinking
And this lunatic at my elbow who sees the morning rising—
(*This half-wit at my elbow who sees the morning rising*)"

New York City

1937

Black Sea Rest Home

CLEAN sea running like quick-silver on shale, on hot worn
stone,
Lapping, lipping the rock of the bare beach; and I repeat,
gazing;
This is the shore where Jason came Here grew the fleecy tree.
Here hung the large fruit of legend, and here the bronze
birds sang
I see the same sun-up over Asia, thin color of lemon,
Sense the zest of lost races, and greatness tools, language,
trade
Here is the memory of ancient peoples—picking and culling
Shells, boiling dye, dragging nets, bathing to kill lice,
Or launching boats to the rough South They worked the
land fallow
With blunt shares, tamed the wild falcon, fought the invader;
Married his woman, took his child for slave, shackled the
sturdy,
Put the hut near the fig tree, planted the pomegranate,
Citrus, oleander, plum Kept custom old, centuries old, and
little change
And with the bent backs of slaves harvested the clean sea, the
convex, moving
Empty and clear near the hot rocks This the Phoenician saw,
And the Tartar and the trader Greek.

In this sweet heat I see

(With the same sky, yes, and the same rush of water on shale,
these pure carry over)

What no man saw on earth before, never before, new and
like rock to stay

Wealth in a just scale, the start without finish, the Soviet
And history jubilant to come Here the floods of toil
Rest. Here they come to put their feet into the old ocean,
Bathe the arms of one will, plunge like dolphins in. . . .
The skilled worker rests in this lap, in this old cradle happy.
Makers of the next great age strip themselves and swim.

Sochi, Black Sea, U S S R

1937

*Near the Church of Mount David, Tiflis
Where Poets Are Buried*

OLDER than saddle-bags or tools of horn
The name of David, first of dancing poets
Who eluded the javelin of Saul, the sword of Goliath,
Who hid in caves.

And still they dance and stamp their feet
Arms out-stretched chanting verses to the stars
In the great town on the tan mountain where
Another hid in caves, starved; whose name and fame
Out of a vaster deed, in many deeds

many as these stars
With galaxies of men
many as these stars

in perils vast
Dearer than David's grows
with syllables of love.

Stamford, Connecticut
1938

To Marcia with Asphodel

I PICKED these on my ramble You want them now.
I would say no; but they are innocent flowers.
You do not see my hand tremble as I perplex how
To tell you or not tell you of this life of ours:—
(The legend in my head and my own legend,
And my view of Hades, and these real lilies. .)

Mallorca, 1932

Bennington, Vermont, 1934

Bounding Line

SILVER rubs rocks and furs the twig
All that was little is still and big.
Attention folds and stoops
To the snail, to slants and loops—
Thread of spider arrayed on the fern

I am frost's fleck, the grain,
The fissure, the dented vein
Here looks the insect's eye
Against lens to magnify
The stuff of frost and chill-burn

Large swells the hoist of shade;
Infinity far overhead.
I am frost, the rim made of shine
On the twig, mercurial line
To cut the small from the big

Small is good, rests on the ground
Small's to be seen, small has bound
In shape like crystal cut.
Crystal-frost lies white in the rut
Crystal-frost rubs gaudy the twig

New York City
1937

Everyday Alchemy

MEN go to women mutely for their peace;
And they, who lack it most, create it when
They make, because they must, loving their men,
A solace for sad bosom-bended heads. There
Is all the meagre peace men get—no otherwhere;
No mountain space, no tree with placid leaves,
Or heavy gloom beneath a young girl's hair,
No sound of valley bell on autumn air
Or room made home with doves along the eaves,
Ever holds peace, like this, poured by poor women
Out of their heart's poverty, for worn men.

Berkeley, California

1919

Swarm

ETHEREAL energy, airy lust,
Intangible madness,—these have made
A bee-like cloud about her head

The coward, the coward is running home
To hide herself in a bed of dust—
To huddle into an ugly bed.
Underground they can never come

She broke and ate their honeycomb.
Over her belly the bees will hum.

New Preston, Connecticut
1926

Letter in Solitude

HERE are autumn certainties:
I will love you and the trees
Go on yellowing and the sun
Stand and pour its radiance down.

Count the seasonal certainties.
I will love you and the trees
Color like a carnival,
Color and refuse to fall,
To show a new aspect of trees
More nearly like themselves than these.

I will love you as I have said·
After all the leaves are shed,
And the sky is fastened down,
And the valley depth is brown,
And the ruts begin to freeze
There are other certainties

Surely love you but with none
Of that radiant tint of sun;
As if a cloud had curled across
The sun, and clung like lichen moss,

Love you surely, but in a prone
Dogged way, more like a stone;
As if a stone's touch gave a cue
To a clearer love of you

However absently the eyes
Thinking their inner thoughts may stare
They match within the sharpened size
Of hillshapes in the cutting air

And so, by seeing uncovered ground
And outlines gaunter all the time
I see love also winter-bound
And think more simply into rhyme

And since love gets its tempered sense
From the large fact of altering earth
I love the winter, stubborn, dense,
And love the storm my love is worth.

New Preston, Connecticut

1927

With Child

Now I am slow and placid, fond of sun,
Like a sleek beast, or a worn one,
No slim and languid girl—not glad
With the windy trip I once had,
But velvet-footed, musing of my own,
Torpid, mellow, stupid as a stone

You cleft me with your beauty's pulse, and now
Your pulse has taken body Care not how
The old grace goes, how heavy I am grown,
Big with this loneliness, how you alone
Ponder our love Touch my feet and feel
How earth tingles, teeming at my heel!
Earth's urge, not mine,—my little death, not hers;
And the pure beauty yearns and stirs.

It does not heed our ecstasies, it turns
With secrets of its own, its own concerns,
Toward a windy world of its own, toward stark
And solitary places In the dark
Defiant even now, it tugs and moans
To be untangled from these mother's bones.

Hartford, Connecticut

1921

Enceinte

(Translated by Eugène Jolas)

Je suis lente et placide désirant le soleil,
Une bête soyeuse, en quête de sommeil
Pas une jeune fille languie et pas heureuse,
Comme jadis au temps de ma marche venteuse;
Mais au pas de velours et rêvant à ma chair—
Mais molle et engourdie et semblable à la pierre

Le choc de ta beauté m'a fondue à cette heure,
Et ton sang a pris corps. Qu'il n'importe à ton cœur
Que s'en aille ma grâce, que je sois lorde et veule
Grosse en la solitude, et que toi, tu sois seul
Songeant à notre amour Touche mes pieds, et sens
La terre palpiter, fertile à mes talons!
L'élan de cette terre, ma mort—pas la sienne,
Et la beauté désire et crie son antienne

Car elle se refuse à voir nos yeux ravis,
Elle tourne avec ses secrets et ses soucis,
Vers son monde venteux et vers des endroits rudes
Et solitaires Dans la nuit des solitudes
Défiant toujours, elle s'arrache amère
Et se délivre enfin des os de cette mère

2

Dead Man

SAP stirs near me, roots stretch and seize,
Sundering stones
And rivers waken, start in monotones
Their later tunes.
Oaks bend their knotted knees
In labor and the full earth groans
Like women big with their increase;
While underground my body lies
With open eyes
In this stiff pose of peace.

New York City

1920

Thirst

THERE is a bird that hangs head-down and cries
Between the mango leaves and passion vines.
Below a spotted serpent twines
And blunts its head against the yellowing skies.
Along the warping ground a turtle scrapes
And tortured lie glazed fishes in marsh grass
Across a sky that burnishes like brass
A bat veers stupid with the yeast of grapes.

New York City

1920

Spring Touch

How tender-mad the little meadows lie!
The wobbling lambs are tasting milky weeds,
The tipsy trees
Are leaned like foam on green wind-gullied seas;
The pale moth flutters where the pale moth leads,
And you, swimming the sky
Waist deep in apple-blossoms,—I
Sweet to your thigh
Take the new tingle of the froth of seeds

Talcott Mountain

Hartford, Connecticut

1921

Tired Girl

PUT her away some place between two hills
Away from the sea and the sun
She has so much to think of, must she run
On your bright bosom always, Mother Earth?
Put her away and let some other birth
Bring her back to the sound of the sea and the sun.
After she ponders under silent hills
Beneath your swarming bosom, Mother Earth
She will have words for her beloved one

New York City

1920

Dissonance Then Silence

BOTH being cowards and pulses ice,
Knowing each the others' paradise;

Wanton with anguish and wry bliss
Bruised the too great love with a death's kiss,

As eyes closed cruel blind and ecstasy
Weeping and ceasing to weep, went free

To come again in circles, lessening,
But widening the span of ancient pain;

There being pain for tasting paradise,
And pain for lack of it, pain twice,

And the last pain· to see the flying moon,
To be immobile and to make no moan

New Preston, Connecticut

1926

Sea Change

YOU are no more but sunken in a sea
Sheer into dream ten thousand leagues you fell;
And now you lie green-golden while a bell
Swings with a tide, my heart And all is well
Till I look down, and wavering, the spell—
Your loveliness—returns There in the sea
Where you lie amber pale and coral cool
You are most loved, most lost, most beautiful.

New York City

1920

No More This Home

WEEP, weep, and fasten the gate
The moon is a laggard,—the straight
Lines from the stars, the star-threads
Streak the elms, the bowed leaf-heads.

I wait, and my love, he is late,
Broken apart with some grief,
Walking the mould of the leaf,
Treading as the stricken treads

No more this home . . . nor these doors
To open, to startle, to shut,
Announcing our angers—to cut
The air back and forth like our wills

Seal the door-sills

Cornwall-on-Hudson

1928

3

The Four Songs

FOUR songs I'll sing to you
From the four seasons taken,
Each of them partly true,
Showing you how once-shaken
Like autumn, like winter, stoic, sad,
Elated like early spring
I am; like summer, equally laden
With fruit of matron-mind and maiden
Four songs I'll sing
To you,—flute voices anyone
Might, from all nature fancy and seize on,
Since it is well in singing songs to you
I should select those clear and general
Moods-in-the-earth mankind has known so well,
Four songs I'll sing to you,
And amply sing

But to these affirmations will you add
—Nothing you see in nature, no, nothing—
Something no summer mirrors, an outline
No moon will stamp with her official shine,
Something not sung by me, but mine,
Added, if added, by its like in you

Four songs I'll sing to you
False, candid art!
So much of me as is not me
I give to you, re-worded, with all my heart
Then, done with seasons, sun and moon and sea,
Knowing their symbols no more than little-true,
I wait the sure rejoinder,—monody
That comes when I am done, from listening you.
What else I am you are implored to sense
At your own pain. Our odd identity
Cannot be sung In us, this difference
No metaphor from nature can supply
So if I would, I could not further, I,
Whose words past this monotony are all mistaken;
Four songs I'll sing to you, never to die
From the four seasons taken

Capri, 1931

Mallorca, 1932

Remembering Vaughan in New England

*I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light .
—Henry Vaughan, The World*

I SAW reality the other night,
By New England moon-light.

All of my life, living had been
One or another kind of dream

Now, nothing festooned itself between
Me and the substance of moon-beam

The land is honest, small and swept
Bare as a barn-yard floor

In winter. And no third thing crept
As it had, times before

No feeling, its mist to intervene,
No inner thought to warp . . .

I stood and behold, the trees were lean,
And lo! the hills were sharp.

Moon's no ephemeral faint stuff
First seen, painted upon

Windows and walls—it is yellow as dawn,
After dream, it is marvelous rough,

Coarse as hoar-frost—texture no dream
Can invent

Cut my vague dreams away!

Moon in New England, O pure moon-beam,

Let it be day.

Cornwall-on-Hudson
1928

Return of the Native

Now, after years serving demonic excess,
Exalting those whose god-passions send them mad,
I am stranded on a simpler shore, much less
Sumptuous,—a land permanently sad,

Bearing a sombre harvest—an old island,
With cactus and asphodel and olive on
The rock itself This oddly, is my land
Here a moderate joy yellows the sky each dawn

We toil—here toil has lost its hectic haste
The outrageous wrongs men do, lessen, diminish
We are frugal, we share, we despise waste
The work I have is good It is not mine to finish

Mallorca, 1932

Bennington, Vermont, 1933

Detail

ON A New York evening of thin tedium
A woman with blue eyes and some feeling read
A poem, while the city like a drum
Heavied her voice Casually, she was dead

A little later I recall and cannot find
The poem It was a poem then,
About a clock that ticked and would unwind
In an old house, and strike out nine or ten

While sparrows chattered and feathered on outside
By Thomas Hardy Three quatrains
We were not friends We were polite She died
In a meagre way, I think, of minor pains

And in the deckle edges of his thick
Books I have looked, but I cannot find
The poem Still the clock does tick
Somewhere, and the springs unwind

(And the insignificant woman, and the dull, polite
Evening . the subway crammed and stale)
Goodnight, goodnight, goodnight, goodnight, goodnight,
Woman and poem in limbo

Detail, detail,
Of the infallible city of our failure, drawn to scale

Winterton, New York

1927

Train: Abstraction

THE steely train in the stupid green
Of sleepy, sleepy summer tore
An even rent in the placid clean
Cloth of the air with an onward roar

Above the sharp diagonal,—the two
Lines either side the rended cleft—
The air closed in, the green stuff grew
Almost together—until the train tore left

I saw this happen daily and watched both
Saw the air mend, and the round earth pinch the crack—
After the train sprung them open with an oath,
A massive pressure Until the train came back

Dark spot of these rails—lines laid merely for speed—
Dark clot of speed on pure line, to assert
Idea the line, the dark acceleration, the deed,
Passing along the line to kill the inert

Winterlon, New York

1927

To the Natural World: at 37

EXQUISITE world, powerful, joyous, splendid,
Where, almost when we learn to live, our life is ended,
Where, when we gather our trophy errors in,
And face the array and cannot again begin
To make another life less fatal, less
Like a poor travesty of some greatness,
World, you rebuke us calmly, ceaselessly,
With mute round of rising sun and mimicking sea,
With flood and ebb and taciturn refrain
In round diurnal rings, waxing to wane
Our mortal life runs through you its swift line
Closing no circle, marking its scratch design,
Fusiform, the spindle, this is its mortal shape;—
O lovely world, midway in large landscape
I pause, look forward Weakness with wisdom lie
Ahead with nodding age, error and energy
Behind, dim in regret and chaos where
I left my early self and got the despair
That seizes all who see how folly gone
Is their sweet youth with darkness sudden on
World deign, for one moment, O deign to culminate
One wave in me, O in me consummate
Your surge with all beholding happy power.

So, overlapping once, here in the midway hour,
Let me watch outward splendor solemnly for
Life's brief in all this bigness, O sun's calm, O
Sea's roar

Mallorca

1932

To the Queen of Heaven

(Athena speaks)

Dedicated to Martha Graham

MAIDEN in love with Possibility,
Seducing from the Void, the Event,
Look, curiously virginal creature, look on me
On whom the void lies barren and frequent

Storms of small meaning pass and sadden, send
Some fate unique, locked in some bosom, make
Of nothingness a substance, Mother, lend
Me Thy archaic smile, the blind gaze of the bacchante,
For my sake,
Amen.

Mallorca

1932

North American Spring

SPRING works like a beaver, busy thing,
Continent-wide, Quebec to San Jose
See all the evidence of sedulous spring—
The local sign of large and liberal May

A trifle late or a trifle earlier,
Homely or romantic Once I saw
New wheat, white locusts, and dandelions blur
Outside the train that left for Omaha

Jasmine and the cold crocus both work for spring
In warmth one bud, another bud for cold
And the big counter offers everything
From Texas lily to marsh marigold

Freshets of green, tons of motley flowers,
Color by the acre Sweet festival of charms,
Crisp, out of stems, timed to their proper hours,
Coming with no delay to far-off farms

Vermont's just thawing where the arbutus creep
Lilacs in Ohio are half-starred
Prairie's level is green for chewing sheep
And balls of bloom unshake in every yard

How many springs we have, each with its style!
After the local yellow comes to stay
Take a dream trip from Oshkosh to Belle Isle,
Have joy in the large inventiveness of May.

It's a fine country with its happy frills
Children grow up demanding lavish things,
Led to expect, after fever and chills,
After grim winters, incredible springs

New York City

1938

Flute in Late Summer

THE dandelion is frayed
And puffed on pipe
Summer is delicately made
And the season ripe.
See the sun on the grass fade
From gold to green stripe

Summer is delicately made
While it is, it is ceasing
At first we are a touch afraid
At summer's teasing,
And move from sun to shade
Fear shadow-increasing

At first we are a touch afraid
We start, we take care
We delay, or we evade,
We wait or we stare
To see ripeness decayed
And the bright earth bare

We delay and we evade
But by degrees, relenting,
Color-timbre, grade on grade
The dimming eye inventing,
Until even the pale and the half-shed
Blow clean with calm consenting

The dandelion is frayed
And puffed on pipe
Summer is delicately made,
And the season ripe
See the sun on the grass fade
From gold to green stripe

New York City

1935

Dilemma of the Elm

IN SUMMER elms are made for me.
I walk ignoring them and they
Ignore my walking in a way
I like in any elegant tree

Fountain of the elm is shape
For something I have felt and said .
In winter to hear the lonely scrape
Of rooty branches overhead

Should make me only half believe
An elm had ever a frond of green—
Faced by the absence of a leaf
Forget the fair elms I have seen.

(A wiry fountain black upon
The little landscape pale-blue with snow—
Elm of my summer, obscurely gone
To leave me another elm to know)

Instead, I paint it with my thought,
Not knowing, hardly, that I do,
The elm comes back I had forgot,
I see it green, absurdly new

Grotesquely growing in the snow.
In winter an elm's a double tree.
In winter all elms trouble me.

But in summer elms are made for me
I can ignore the way they grow.

New York City

1927

Command from a Hammock

WHALE-CLOUD, go off, a mile an hour
On your slow business with the air,
Getting ingredients for a shower
Until you reach the sky-scape where

My love, not styled a little man
Looks like a black twig in the sea,
Under, in shadow, smaller than
He ever seems when seen by me

And on your way contrive some weird
Arresting form, make yourself so
Peculiar, cumulous, elephant-eared,—
Leave off the whale-shape as you go . .

And loom so queerly as you put
Your twilight on him while he swims,
His eyes will open first, then shut,
Salt-water silver round the rims,

That he will say to someone else,—
Half to himself and half aloud,—
As one child always sees and tells
Another, pointing, *See the cloud!*

Winterton, New York

1927

Definition of Song

SINGING is best, it gives right joy to-speech
Six years I squandered, studying to teach,
Expounding language Singing it is better,
Teaching the joy of the song, not teaching the letter

And of all forms of song surely the least
Is solo Only lark in the east
Can say—what no other lone singer can say—
The glory, the glory of the arriving ray

Singing is the work of many voices
Only so when choral mass rejoices
Is the lock sprung on human isolation
And all the many welded into one

Body sings best when feet beat out the time
Translated song, order of bold rhyme,—
Swing the great stanza on the pavement,—use
The public street for publishing good news

Deepest of all, essential to the song
Is common good, grave motive of the throng,
Well-spring of affirmation in accord
Beneath the chanting utterance, the word

Song is not static—joy becomes a dance
In step, vast unison, in step advance.
This is the life of song. that it mean, and move,
And state the massive power of our love

New York City

1935

On Planting a Small Lilac in Vermont

YES, this lilac I am planting signifies
The old New England rural and decayed,
Flower and leaf Frost loves, the lavender,
False-blue that Amy Lowell made
Out of mere statement purple into spray

It's a young lilac tagged from Bloomingdale's
The doorstep that it's by is farmer style
I like to plant, to see the twig-roots bed
Lilac and I will have to wait a while
Before the purpose of this planting's clear

Planting for future people with sure hands
Is pleasure of the purest Live and unfold!
You only seem to be compact New England—
(Her virtues stale and her intelligence cold)
I plant you for another country sure of flowers

How well you nestled into Persian ways!
Your heart-shaped leaf ran on the border cloth.
And in this place of sunken cellar doors,
In deep grass, by deserted barns, you are both
Voluptuous and frugal like the folks

You'll see another change Doorstep will change
The tight sad house will change And in its place
I can't see much, only the doorstep edge,
Hear children talking, see a happier face
Than you can find in the working class today

Grow for those people, lilac Be no family shrub.

Hudson River

1934

To My Students

I TEACH. I expect two-percent return
Sow words; show books, plant thought, burst doors, and
point·
See World, see men at work, partake¹

Students, I shall be content if you learn
By tiresome emphasis from me
"The laws of being are the laws of thought."
"Thought is conditioned by being, not being by thought."

I am indulgent and stern
Be deaf, indifferent Discount, forget, resist
But never mistake
This meaning
"Freedom is the recognition of necessity."
*"By acting on nature outside himself, and changing it
Man simultaneously changes his own nature."*

Bennington, Vermont
1933

At Last the Women Are Moving

LAST, walking with stiff legs as if they carried bundles
Came mothers, housewives, old women who knew why they
abhorred war
Their clothes bunched about them, they hobbled with anxious
steps
To keep with the stride of the marchers, erect, bearing wide
banners

Such women looked odd, marching on American asphalt
Kitchens they knew, sinks, suds, stew-pots and pennies . . .
Dull hurry and worry, clatter, wet hands and backache.
Here they were out in the glare on the militant march

How did these timid, the slaves of breakfast and supper
Get out in the line, drop for once dish-rag and broom?
Here they are as work-worn as stitchers and fitters
Mama have you got some grub, now none of their business

Oh, but these who know in their growing sons and their
husbands

How the exhausted body needs sleep, how often needs food,
These, whose business is keeping the body alive,
These are ready, if you talk their language, to strike.

Kitchen is small, the family story is sad
Out of the musty flats the women come thinking
Not for me and mine only For my class I have come
To walk city miles with many, my will in our work.

New York City
1935

The Vast Hour

ALL essences of sweetness from the white
Warm day go up in vapor when the dark
Comes down Ascends the song of meadow-lark,
Ascends the noon-time smell of grass when night
Takes sunlight from the world and gives it ease
Mysterious wings have brushed the air, and light
Float all the ghosts of sense and sound and sight,
The silent hive is echoing the bees

So stir my thoughts at this slow solemn time
Now only is there certainty for me
When all the day's distilled and understood
So light meets darkness, so my tendrils climb
In this vast hour up the living tree
Where gloom foregathers and the stern winds brood

Berkeley, California

1919

To a Magnificent Spinner, Murdered

GNATS and an ant have gnawed your nimble bones—
You who could spring and sprawl on your own thread
Down half the meadow Under tiny stones
The ant has stored your essence You are dead

You stitched the air with level darts, the sun
Slid on your silvers Now they slant oblique
Like strokes of rain

Your neighbors have begun
 To chew the cud of festoons From the cheek
 Of this your hairy enemy dangles one
 Loop of his glee to tease your skeleton

Wasps sting the grapes still, carry spider-spoil
In twisted torment past your web and on
Where their crude honey hangs in muddy cones
The ants are hurried One huge bee intones
The pond is wrinkled with a velvet oil
Where gnats will hatch, with dusk, another spawn

San Juan, California
1922

Changes of the Soul

THIS opulent earth, this wealth, these incredible red leaves
Once were ours, ours more than other seasons. (Autumn
drunken,

Triumphant, I called you) Now in alternate gloom and
stealth,—

Such is our habit now, that hides and grieves,—
Over a frozen field, in a shrunken place here two months
hence

I see clouds moving winter-dull and dense,
Over the gathered sheaves, over this opulent earth,
Over this wealth, these incredible red leaves,
The shadows come in winter-darkened patches
O, the heart matches winter better now

Still, the sense
Remembers the red chaos, the melancholy red,
The sorrow, the madness, no, it will no longer remem-
ber

Winter, winter wind, blow clutter clean
Winter, winter wind, blow clutter clean

Begin, begin, begin,
Begin again.

Bennington, Vermont
1933

Blame Them

With the first pang, she knew the whole.
The loom's behavior: how the edge
Once the thread pulled, raveled the mutual soul,
And how each night, with the night's pledge

How to set, herself, the mutual task again
He wove his piece with troubled eyes,
Astonished at the strands of pain
Until with practice he grew clumsy-wise

She like an adept, quarreled and sang,
You might have enjoyed to see her face;
Lit by such zest from the first pang,
So poison-sure from the first embrace

But both were broken-hearted—she
With a deadly touch she could not quit
Worked the design to the end, and he
Thought only he was to blame for it.

While she, so poison-ardent and so deft
Traced in their love a fair picture of his pain,
Right hand the subtle assassin to her left:
Told all the mean geometry of her brain

Judge here, you, lyric and imitative lovers,
Who take emotions from a book by rote,
What brand of poison this was Let who first discovers
Name for this evil, plan an antidote

South Hadley, Massachusetts

1929

Two of a Kind: Marriage à la Mode

How did she know when at country club she flirted fondly
With boys, how did she sense her gross suburban doom:
To find with no rehearsal and no surprise how oddly
The man's soul locked itself, to primp, in the best bath-
room

He learned with one grimace on his dead-pan phiz the bitter
Cycles of love, the catty talk, the big headaches,
And feared like a brute the unpleasant profundities that
glitter

In the eyes of sexy women and of snakes

Bennington, Vermont

1933

To Mr. Maunder Maunder, Professional Poet

I'LL be your Gigadibs,—despise
 You, root and branch and lock and barrel,
The filmy way you use your eyes,
 The words you take for your apparel,
The way you edit with discretion,
The poetry you pick for nice
Work of a safe and sane profession

You should be shown the edge of the sword,
 And taught to die for a stubborn phrase
Or burn on pyres for a word!
 And have swift passions, in a horde
Run up and peer into your face
And jeer your petty, petty grace—
Have mercy on Thy Poets, Lord!

Here, learn the temper of the tool
 You wield so avid for success
I will not touch your "beautiful"—
 Carve beauty more and rant her less .
The English Language is no whore—
What are you making rhyme-schemes for?

New York City
1927

The Synonym

To a Romantic

THE mourners who surround his crystal coffin,
Who totter, shuffle, group about his hearse
Are the vast abstractions used to make his verse,
They are the words italicized, invisibly, too often, . . .

He who used "horror," often, and—fondly, "agony,"
"Anguish," "terror," "despair," etc , lies smiling like a child
In bed,—in the innocence of crystal suddenly free
Of the debauched words Oh, bland and mild

He rests in his romantic certainty of fame
The words cry the rehearsed plaint of his distraction,
His eyes are shut in a mighty stupefaction,
The enfeebled words repeat the synonym, his name

Mallorca

1931

A Middle-aged, Middle-class Woman at Midnight

IN THE middle of winter, middle of night
A woman took veronal in vain How hard it is to sleep
If you once think of the cold, continent-wide
Iron bitter Ten below Here in bed I stiffen
It was a mink-coat Christmas said the papers . .
Heated taxis and orchids Stealthy cold, old terror
Of the poor, and especially the children
Now try to sleep
In Vermont near the marble-quarries . . I must not think
Again, wide awake again O medicine
Give blank against that fact, the strike, the cold.
How cold Vermont can be It's nerves, I know,
But I keep thinking how a rat will gnaw
In an old house Hunger that has no haste .
Porcupines eat salt out of wood in winter Starve
So our children now Brush back the hair from forehead,
See the set faces hungrier than rodents In the Ford towns
They shrivel Their fathers accept tear gas and blackjacks
When they sleep, whimper Bad sleep for us all
Their mouths work, supposing food Fine boys and girls
Hunger, busy with this cold to make barbarian
These states, to haunt the houses of farmers, destroyers
Of crops by plan And the city poor in cold-water flats
Fingering the gas-cocks—*can't even die easy*
If they turn the gas off. I'm sick I tell you. Veronal

Costs money, too. Costs more than I can pay
And night's long nightmare costs me, costs me much
I'll not endure this stink of poverty Sheriffs, cops,
Boss of the town, union enemy, crooks and cousins,
I hope the people win.

New York City

1934

To an American Workman Dying of Starvation

SWELL guy, you got to die

Did you have fun?

I guess we know you worked

I guess we saw you

It got you just the same

Say it with flowers

So long We got the breaks But we'll be seeing you

There's a little job we got to attend to up here first.

Bennington, Vermont

1933

Work and Rest in Large Figures

WALK where the stars are large
Solemn in late summer,
Large as yellow panes
Beyond, beyond the blond hay
Smell of hay and dust
Warm and the stars solemn
Dust under quiet foot,
Stubble and gleaning strown
Harvester standing with stars,
Hulk of iron passive
Next the stacks of threshed wheat,
The ricks, the rakes and the sacks
Nestle here Take your rest
If a katydid cries, if a toad
Makes a dark sound or a rustle
Take it for accent of ease
Work done, dust down,
Harvest home, planet warm
And stars like large drops of water
First we worked and then we rested Peace.

New York City

1938

Lines on Entering and Leaving a Meadow

TRILLIONS of crickets jump in a pretty
Wave either side of my skirts as I pass,
Sleepy and happy, just come from the city
Delighted with grass

As if I were steering in pale gold seas
Where drops of water leap away from the prow
I walk in this old meadow waved to the knees
By windy shadow

Activity here a plenty and a stately progress
Earth herself is a planet-boat
Running to autumn country of no dress
With snow for a coat

I think of ships And the earth cleaving
The verge of whitening cold is a ship
This meadow is the front deck We are leaving
The warmth for a trip

When we come back we will be older
By a solar year both earth and I,
Before that we must prepare for colder
Zones, for maelstrom in the sky.

Back to the trillions of crickets certain next year
With earth as solid as ever; and men
Deep in history, unc cosmic and unclear. . . .
With luck I will come here again

Jamaica, Vermont

1937

To My Sister Born in the Tropics

You grew up on *O Susannah*. Natural, the plaint of *Sweet Lelanī*,

Natural like the odor of nubs on the lang-lang
You were famous with your family You were full of disdain.
Stuff of life came sweet and well composed
In you, swart girl with the homespun chin,
And the jaunty manner of the old wild west,
Remembering fifteen races of little children singing *Hawai
Po Nui*,

Fire and innocence, the jokes of the lonely uncle . . .
Resolute sad mouth imposed and the best pair of eyes I ever
saw.

You are a flower whose gentleness we shall all discover
By and by More than all flowers but a flower still,
With mid-Pacific promise for the sky You deserve
Dew, the courtesy of a clean sun, and a bowing and nodding
company

Of friends Always with you I hear the melancholy airs.
I hear not wails, not chants and never Orient song,
But very nervous wild and jaunty, so
Remote—St Louie Blues on an oboe in the evening

Stamford, Connecticut

1938

To My Mother

THE long delight and early
I heard in my small years clearly;
The morning song, bed-making, bustle for new undertaking,
With dish-washing and hay-raking,

This vanished or seemed diminished,
Was lost, in trouble finished
I did nervous work, unsteady, captive work and heady.
Nothing well-done and ready

And heard in other places
Than home, and from foreign faces
The dauntless gay and breezy communal song of the busy,
I—idle and uneasy

I said, my work is silly,
Lonely and willy-nilly
See this hand with nicotined habits, this useless hand that
 edits
A chronicle of debits

Join, if I can, the makers,
And the tillers of difficult acres,
And get somehow this dearly lost, this re-discovered rarely
Habit of rising early

New York City
1937

Storm Centre

PAST noon, past the strong
Hour for full song
—However late—
Mere silence holds me Here are met
Furious winds and the great
Quiet is desperate.

Utterly still they stand locked
Once only the earth rocked
With the weakening of one

This is battle, forehead on
Barbarous singing follows when
One triumphs Now the centre
Tightens again
Closes. None enter

It is silent where
Wrestles the air

New Preston, Connecticut
1924

To Keep, to Discard

THIS audit is the end, '
(An end not made as end)
Flung into the pit, descend
Broken bits of the past
Cast away, O cast
Vestige of dear toys,
Your infancy You know
No matter where you go,
Safe with you also
Infancy will be there
In the wise and saddened stare.
And at the height of joy
In man's estate, the boy
Exults that he cast away
The frauds of maturity

New York City

1937

These Triumphant Hills Have Stood

THESE triumphant hills have stood
Waiting for human magnitude;
They have seen
Only the humble and the mean·
The hurried farmer, haying, heaping
Acres of grass before the storm;
Smoke from huts and winter reaping
And the heavy uniform
Furrow . These hills have seen
Only the meagre and the mean;
Awkward women weeding rows,
Children brandishing at crows,
Men building barns, men cutting wood
In cankered solitude

New Preston, Connecticut

1924

To One Loved Wholly Within Wisdom

SOMEONE will reap you like a field,
Pile your gathered plunder,

Garner what you bring to yield,
Turn your beauty under.

In cruel usages, in such
Sickle-cutting, heaping,

Certain women toil too much,
Weary of their reaping

Someone else may winnow you,
Someone else may plunder

I have cut too many new
Swathes, and broken under

Soil that should have fallow lain
To be greedy either

For the shattered stalk, the stain
Where the clusters wither

New Preston, Connecticut
1926

Time Out

WE WILL put time to sleep on that warm hill,
Lie naked in the tawny grass and fill
Our veins with golden bubbles

Grass will grow
Beneath your arm-pits and between your feet
Before we take our bodies up and go
Like dazzled aliens through the dusty street

New Preston, Connecticut
1925

Dead Grecians

HE WORSHIPPED her in quaint and quiet ways,
Linked her with loveliness and taught her to be proud;
But once she ran and crying in a cloud
Dark as her torment, intruded on his gaze,
Like a lost child, crying its soul aloud.

She robbed him of herself, for his cool praise,
And took sweet adoration from his days,
And now he loved dead Grecians, marble-browed

New York City

1925

Imminent Doom

THIS frail and fragrant morning
Is streaming on toward noon;
Listen to my warning'
There will be buzzing soon.
Soon we shall be shaken
Like flowers and gold grass
And all our pollen taken
By a bee with bowels of brass

New Preston, Connecticut

1925

A Story

LOVE came a little too late
Bringing hunger and danger and hate

With these she made up her bed,
With these devoured sparse bread

These, the gifts of her fate,
Splendor and sorrow—then late
Wave on wave, instead
Came hunger and danger and hate

There was love, but frail with the weight
Of hunger and danger and hate
—These I endured, she said

These she endured They are great
She is greater than these. She is dead

New Preston, Connecticut

1924

Two Poems to Emily Dickinson

(In her own language)

I

TO DEVIATE at all
After such groove is made
Equals in final consequence
Resolve to jump the track,
So perilous, the small
Divergence by a shade
From parallels of sense
No train will falter back
Slow motion to that track

II

THERE'S a longitude of mind to chart
On a latitude of fact
Our mariner uses both
And sets his compass true

He proves the needle on the heart
To so appraise the act,
And only listens to the oath
As deaf officials do.

There's a longitude of mind to chart
On a latitude of fact
Our mariner uses both
And sets his compass true

New York City

1934

Dedication

(From *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*)

EMILY!

The book is bound

The pages cut

Index says. *Emily*.

Where are you found?

Deity will see to it

That you never do it.

Deity did

You are vexed

You vanish, with a text

Still you have been

Some months my shy companion While I wrote

The slow prose,

You watched, alert, amused Your words

Fell on the page, consenting, with my words

Index offended you,

The binding and the print,

The sold book, *possession*, the review

Emily, where are you?

Go to her verse, reader,
To the great verse.
Here is nothing of hers.

She will elude us all,
Run from any but her own call
Read her own page, reader
Wait . . . read the great verse Do not look up if you think
you hear her

Do not for a moment stir
She will come near, confidently nearer,
Even as I write this, she is here

South Hadley, Massachusetts

1930

To the Tiresome Friend

PEEK in, scuttle, frisk out,
Imperishable doubt

Chipmunk insinuation,
Rodent imagination,
Hoarder and trifle-seeker,
O frantic little squeaker

Peek in, scuttle, nibble,
Quiver, quiver, quibble

New York City
1937

*To Two Young Men Who Committed Suicide
in Paris in 1932*

WE ARGUED about Monet We said goodbye at the boat-train.
You were done with the U S A you said Goodbye, goodbye.
You might go to Spain for the winter

But you changed your sorrowful minds
Friends, why did you die without profit to the world?
I think of the boys in the mud who saved Madrid
And how they bled in the snow and held Teruel

New York City

1937

Autumn Song for Anti-Fascists

THE leaves come down with little grieving,
Soft in the season of unleafing
Secure in change, in temporary
Death the old sad heart is merry
Delicate death and leaf-stem pliant
General death no nature fears,
Indifferent to tears
Grief in the world strides like a giant
Grief's mask, his bully forehead bare
Comes catapulting close, his stare
Frightens to death the old and ill
Here the mould of green, the chill
Comforts the pulse, the black heart-ache,
So that we listen while the bland trees shake
And put aside all fear
In the innocent withering of the year
The brave assault the bully, bleed
Red on grasses and dying weed,
And redden the trampled ground
Soldier dead, sleep sound
Leaves of pale yellow softly pile
Where we put you, single-file

New York City

1937

To Herndon, Leider, Levinger and Many Others

THE front of trouble draws
Our best; and there they die
O Magnet, O great Cause
That drew these young ones, I
Feel in their death the pull,
The finality they add.
No fighter ever had
A grave so powerful

O Magnet, O great Cause

New York City

1937

Coast of the New World

WE SAW jolly dolphins at Gagrı
Sitting quietly in the heat on the boat-deck;
Saw the razor line of blue, and the up-lands, tilled
And they were dancing the lesginka in the shaded cabin,
Rollicking, while we moved with the simple pomp of ships
All together, asleep and awake, the studious, the tired and
the ecstatic
The long caressing wave went with us the whole way,
While all around the students read Pushkin and Marx
A poem came into my mind every time a wave foamed.
And so we moved in a trance down the coast of the new
world
Until we came to Sukum

New York City

1936

U. S. S. R. 1917-1937

THE men who work along the rivers know
On Amazon and Ganges creeps the news
Where boats and flags of any nation go
Dark faces gather to question the sailor-crews

The wharves, the harbor cities fed by trade
Learn where the sailor saw with his own eyes
A country come forever past the shade
The dark, the stormy death that on this planet lies

Their heroes, cables, letters, speak out-right
Their clearest words are silenced as if, quick,
By radio-control a clever light
Tuned off the cycle with impervious click

But to the peoples in this anxious year
The news seeps without stop It is good news
The worker and the idle worker hear
The simple facts that crooks cannot confuse

See, on this planet one large patch is changed
The other areas work like chemical dyes
To blot the color out maps daily ranged
In new alliance with new elaborate lies

But in this moment when continually hiss
The whistling bombs, the bullets, in this year
Quick-silver streams, the intelligence of this
Spread like a net of rivers, uniting on the sphere.

New York City

1937

Called Divine

"Nothing pleases me." Quick discontent'
El Greco wrote in the corner of his square
Of colored canvas, after days misspent,
After days of silent painting, stare on stare

At the old sitter, near Venice, in the studio
Bassano kept The apprentice hand,
Ill-tempered with its craft, wrote curtly so
And dropped the brush To understand

The later painter, read that El Greco
Meet Lawrence, ill as the saints you understood,
Who went from place to place for peace, with no
Luck, dying, scribbling *"This place is no good."*

For Pushkin

OUR English and your Russian clash. We hear
The repeated tale of genius. We are told
How a certain poet mastered heart, mind and ear
Of Russia And perished And left new styles, new liberal
loves, for old

We have seen his portrait-face, dark, gay and Byronic
Read books about him, and a few neat marvelous verses,
Epigrams, robust, impudent, sweet and sardonic
Recalled the duels, the scandals and the frenzied curses

Felt shame and a slow disgust for the circle of flunkies
Surrounding the Czar—that web of poisonous spinners,
And loathed as he did, the duplicity of court monkeys
And loved Pushkin, the young man, prince of loveable
sinners.

Language and time distort We discount and we doubt
The eulogies in books How well does this poet resist
Time's waste, we ask Is he spoken? Are lines lifted out
And used? In spite of gigantic change does he persist?

Spoiled noble and great poet. How great we see:
They bend over Pushkin's pages, smile, argue, sing his airs.
Pushkin is the worker's love, study, pleasure. We
Measure his name by this, that he is theirs.

New York City

1937

The Tourist

HE SAW the hula flower in her hair
Dropt to her bosom where it rose and fell.
Forgotten was her lover; her slow stare
Felt for his eyes; her warm body's smell—
The yellow stamen perfume on her breath,
The poison-heavy sleepiness of death
Made all her figure's slender golden grace
Swing like a censer in an altared place

Swinging she danced the hula and the moon
Hung on a mountain honeying the night
Her dress of flowers whirled about her—strewn
Along the grass the fire-petals died
Then like a bat against that disc of light
Leaped up her lover and the lonely wide
Hollow and shadow echoed as he cried

Berkeley, California

1917

6

Folk Song with Chorus

Boys and girls, come out to play
The sun is up, the wind's astray,
*I have never done with you
Half the things I want to do.*
Early morning's gold is gone—
They slumber on, they slumber on
Ninety million miles away
The sun haloos "Come out to play,
The winds are prancing on tip-toe,
Impatient with long waiting so,
The hills look up Come out and oh
Let your bodies dart and run
While I make shadows," says the sun

Boys and girls come out to play
Before the river runs away,
I have never done with you
Half the things I want to do

The Sun

Boys and girls, come out to play
Before the river runs away,
While you are fluid, unafraid,
Beneath my light and shadow skim,
Before this folded gloom is dim

And limb no longer follows limb
Dancing under spotted shade

For dancing were your bodies made.
Before the roses of you fade
Find your meaning for the mouth
While I lean south; oh, be all mine,
Both he and she in my all-shine.

Nimble you move—you are my own
My pliant essence All alone
On fire in the passive sky
I burn—a stone, a golden stone,
Together you in double shade
Discover why your limbs were made

CHORUS

Before the river runs away,
Boys and girls, come out to play
(They slumber on, they slumber on,
Morning's glint is almost gone)
With yellow bubbles fill your veins
Before the lusty day-star wanes
(They slumber on, they slumber on,
Silken leopard noon is gone)
Die you may, die you must—
Fill your mouths with pollen dust
Calyxes and honey-thighs

Both will wither. Beauty dies.
Find out why mouths are berry-red
Before you stiffen in your drab bed
Over you humming summer will glide,
You'll never lie languid on your side
And listen then as you listen now
To half-heard melodies Oh, how
The river runs and runs and runs
Fluid with splendor, and the sun's
Circuit is singing Fragile day!
Boys and girls come out to play
New York City
1920

Ice Age

NOISELESSLY the planets will blow by,
Like smoke, like breath, like driven snow,
Frost-bitten suns on on, on on will blow,
Over earth's curve, the moons, like birds, will fly
Making no noise and only vague shadow

And spider snow will spin and spin
A tangle of frost to snare earth in

Little earth, then,
Will house few men
Little earth, shrunken—
No longer drunken
Purple, splendid, roistering earth,
Little earth hung
With pearls of seas,
Little earth shivering,
About to freeze

And through her veins, caught in this web,
Life and color and sound will ebb

There will be faint tints, none
From the center of the sun

There will be light noises, no
Sound harsher than snow.

Never a sound of thunder or river,
Torrent or stone—
Only vague breath from the old life-giver,
Making her own
Final, lingering filigree
Of frost, blown
On the glass of the sky, in planet and tree,
An icicle moon, a torrent and three
Glittering stars half-grown,
A slight tone
Rippling sound into the stilling river,
The crisp sea.

And spider snow will spin and spin
A tangle of cold to catch earth in

Morning's red yawn,
Evening's pain,
Never will startle the earth, then,
Pure from her stain,
Her garments discarded or cleansed by the cold clean hands
of the rain.

A leaf's lines, a stem's tints,
Make in icy places, prints,

Trace of a foot, of a hooked claw,
Settled to stone since the last thaw,

Minnows bent with wavering
Along a pool's ice-edges cling

All the beautiful, brave
Colors that curled in the wave—
Flooding ground purple and crimsoning air—
Are battered and rigid and bare

Earth, bled of her sap,
Too stiff to unfold
The sprouted mold
In the cleft of her lap,

While circles woven nearer now
Hang cold broodings on her brow,

Still, then crackling—once more still—
Icy feet come up the hill

Pushing back the granite fright
Men sing morning and sing night!

Only singing matters now,
With stark birds on every bough

Carolling for morning, carolling for noon
Stiff tasks done with a tiny tune,
And never a note
In timbre any bigger than the tone of a flute—
Little sounds only, coming in your throat,
And the big sounds mute

Thinner, rarer and more shrill,
As silence whitens on the hill
Whistling in daylight to keep up nerve,
While blue whiteness comes up the curve

Bravado of sparse breath
Blown straight at death,
Voices in silences, swooping like birds,
Voices and carolling,
Warm words
Flung at the sky's stiff stare—
Into the brittle air—
A laugh like a torch's flare

Desperate gaiety and games,
And pleasantries for comfort like wan flames,
Will be their only way,
For, in the midst of play—
Pause—a long sway,
Something faltering underneath,
The brief

Gasp of the breath, eye's blur,
Blunder of mortal fingers, words too thick to say,
Slight motions underneath the gray
Faces of cloud,
And carolling, carolling, carolling loud,
To keep the cold away

Some will slouch,
Lazy, brave;
Others crouch
In a hidden cave,
Hearing near and hearing far
Heavy steps from feet of stone—
Tread the warping fields alone—
Hearing far and hearing near
The wind's hiss in earth's ear—
Feel
Ground fall, and ground reel,
Brittle footsteps steal
Up the hill and down the cliff,
Touching, snapping, making stiff,
While granite footsteps, grinding numb,
Up the little hollow come

Not to give in,
Men will go on
Making vague love, kissing wan
Faces Trying to make

Children with women,
Trying to wake
Hints of old hunger—bitterly break
Flesh that turns marble-hard—trying to take
Life in their arms for their brief comfort's sake

Women will not move as move
Those confident of love
Hurt, like a torpid snake,
Agony drags and stirs but cannot wake

So they will pass their days,
Fostering a child or two—giving names
Of half-remembered music, clamor, sound,
Over hunched shoulders peering round
For cold that creeping comes,
Over and over saying tropic words,
And calling babies after jungle-birds

They will be cheered with each new child,
And the weird
Pall of the sky, and the wild
Tangle of hooped moons piled
Like rubbish in the pallid west,
Won't trouble them so much
With what they feared
They'll touch
Cautiously their children and their lovers—clutch
Anything alive

Not to live in,
Men will go on,
Cold to the chin—
Light-stepping for fear,
Feeling the thin
Ice of the air crack under the weight
Of feather-poised earth, and the near
Nuzzle of snow, and the wind's spear

Smoke from fire
And ice's smoke
Lunge together,
Fight and choke,
Plunge and throttle and fight, and all
Blue smoke vanishes Ashes fall

Some will call the skimming planets, cranes
Going south for winter—nothing more,
And some will sow the icy fields with grains,
Search barren pools,
Harvest sea-weed, plant a pebble, or
Plow snow with patient tools

And they will never cease to look for spring
Climb endless hills,
And turn from east to west and west to east,
Imagining the least
Shreds of far color,
Supposing that they feel

Warmth on their faces, following the wheel
Circling on its axis, they will search the sky
For sign of thaw or rain, or any change—
Looking for birds, where only dead stars fly
And calling snows, and deepening snow falls, strange

In tightening silence, they will search for sound
Beneath the smother of the sky
Find tangled iron, as the first men found
Iron and more than mortal sinew in the ground

And they will worship symbols of sure things—
Sure things, and tangible, cut clear
Forgetting rust, they will keep iron near,
And try to pour into an iron mold
The past's white fire, perishing with cold

And out of iron's touch upon their palms
Will come a song
And they will seize stone hammers, make a clang,
Sing as they never sang—
Wild, assaulting, strong,
(*Clang, cold clang*),
Stone on stone, with iron bits,
Clamped together, (*Clang, clang*),
Iron twisted till it fits—
Notched and jammed and bolted fast—
Rearing heavily and slow
One monument against snow,

A monument to last, a tomb to hold
Yellow pollen of all past
Against the cold.

Until, in the end, comes twilight glimmer:
Voices, faces, motions dimmer,
Breath as low
As the all-covering snow,
Even the evening and the morning laid
Cheek to cheek, will fade—
Radiance and sound made one
And quieted and blended into none

New York City

1921

Turn to the East

Nor Tu Fu, nor the copyist's brush-stroke soft,
Nor rice wine in jade cups
Nor three tones of ink in vista-far crags·
Distance and the ages composed in inches,
Nor the autumn rains on yards of old silk in museums,
Nor Kuan Yin, mercy goddess in gold,
Nor fat buddhas in gold rows, gold upon cedar,
Nor gongs sombre and brassy
These are the husks of China China in a book

Not trips sold in job lots to tourists,
Not the hymn sung off-key in the mission,
No junk dragons, junk temple bells, slick brocades,
No hotel flappers, Hollywood stuff, no hop for addicts .

China has moved Now no longer even
The paper dragon twisting pantomime
Down the village street under fire-cracker noise
Down the mud street under dry bamboo . . .
Nor the little object, art of real glaze
Best in the world, art of pure porcelain,
The superlative shade of good yellow;
Now none of these
China has crawled away and left its skin for your museum,
For your elegant little home

For China the face of Chu Teh rising out of deep Asia,
Chu Teh on a banner, Sun Yat Sen on a banner,
Blowing in a big wind, higher than the Emperor's falcon
flew,
Over a marching horde
Longer than the Wall

A newsreel, not a painting on silk, a far-away film, come
close,
Beautiful and harsh, a flicker on a screen in Manhattan.
Close-up of the face of a slim girl in denim
She looks direct at you under her short hair
Her shoes are of straw *Greetings to comrades in Spain.*
Then empty land and on the beige plain
Four little mongolian ponies trotting, galloping,
With short legs, very fat in the belly, and four men riding,
out-posts,
All going hard over the plain into a big wind

Disregarded the whining and flirting of fans on the stage
To the tiddle of sticks
No more for American globe trotters, the loot of bazars.
For those who stay at home and collect fine feelings, no more
Silence and melancholy after we read aloud
The River Merchant's Wife, purified by restraint of centuries
Re-written by Ezra

No, now they create, they re-create
China in the tall image, the ancestor on a banner

No more mandarin papas The hand with the fine brush
Trembles in the silk sleeve, the telephone rings
The jade collectors had better go home quick.
The puny children of the consul say good-bye to their good
old Amah,
The corrupt legations can put up their shutters now and fade

A big wind is beginning to blow
In the teeth of the barbarian All over Asia
People migrate and arm They laugh direct into the camera
Tax collectors run by in a litter of leaves
The spies stay and are shot, one, two, three, they fall
Like fat pigeons People migrate and arm
I wouldn't try to get up the Yangtse, lady
Wind and poppy fields yellow with a big angry river

China is a long caravan, longer and stronger than the Wall
A moving Wall no Emperor made,
A Wall against the barbarian
The film shows a little rice, pamphlets, and a clean gun

Lake Champlain
1938

"And Mighty Poets in Their Misery Dead"

(A Poem for Moving Pictures)*

I

IDOLATRY ends now Elegy ends now We cease to grieve
For those rare men, sweet Burns and Chatterton.

The wind drops its wailing tune Comes pause—the wait.

Darlings of yesterday, fevered and neglected,
Later loved in avidity for fugitive glory (Add
Also the others—Chopin sobbing in Mallorca, Beethoven
Deaf) These were the peaks We looked On them we
dwelt

II

Pure prelude and dear sonata of gold spirit
Play on; but softly, softly Or better, hush and rest
The light of that white lamp that gravely sweeps
Night sky for air-planes turns elsewhere And see.

* This poem was composed as a script for film The words should accompany the pictures on the sound track First should come the page showing Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence," from which the title line is taken Then pictures of Burns and Chatterton, with music from Chopin and Beethoven woven into the words of the poem

Part II suggests a sudden silence at the end of line 2 with nothing thereafter but the searchlight sweeping and the sounds suggested by log-jam, rush of gravel, and waves, which sounds mount to climax in Part V

The beam falls, the log-jam gives, the open hearth spurts
white;
Ingot goes wild, the mine caves down, hawser parts;
Foam bursts on the deck. Cry, cry loud, one cry.
Then gulf of silence Shroud of tomorrow's toil
Instantly drops, covers anonymous man, the worker, caught.

III

Now searchlight turn and we all eyes, with you,
Full glare on the corpse at home, clean and in state
And silence glaze and freeze with your turbined light
Insects and mites in this fan churn and eddy like snow,
While the tap drips, drips in the kitchen . . .
That gratitude
For toil expended in full love by the genius-strong
Makes common quiet here, and music waits,
Not uttered yet, vibration still unheard

IV

Welders and diggers, puddlers of steel, millions
Strong, simple, disciplined,—the essential men
Moulders, men who bend and heave, drivers of piles, span
builders,
Mechanics, steady and daring, heroes without praise;
So many, we have never stopped to think how many, in the
end

Lie ignored, quiet and stern, in their misery
Dead Mighty millions in their misery dead

V

Rest here, O Lamp Fix this, so long ignored.
Flood-light illumine this man, cast up from a sea—
Do you hear the sea breathing? Will you at least listen?
Yes, the wine-dark sea, with its kiss, sigh, susurrous breath;
Sea of world workers, toilers from far twilight,
Burst on the lenses of a looking world

New York City

1934

B.C.

MARY, the queer girl, in the summer meadow
Met someone—was it man or shadow?

Now Mary walks and smiles, musing
On some dim memory,—choosing
Stones for her feet as she steps over
The shallow stream into ripe clover

Mary is heavy It is late summer
Mary waits for a late comer
In the high clover where no one presses
The green flat Mary guesses
—A boy A girl A boy—pulling
Petals from a hard disc—lulling
All disquiet into bond with him
Who came on one angelic whim
To woo her into madness—Mary
Who had been always quiet, very
Shy, slight and wild, the queer maiden
Who now walks weary, weary and heavy laden

Heavy-laden girl with the anxious eyes,
Nothing again will ever happen to you
Lie down in the clover, weary and heavy-laden,
Lie down and wait, anxious, exquisite maiden

He does not come again, ever again, to woo.
Nothing again will ever happen to you
Who are the source, the wealthy source of all being:
From you, henceforth, come miracles and sermons.

Mary, the queer girl in the summer meadow
Met someone Was it man or shadow?

Now Mary walks and broods, taking
Soft steps to a new aching

The shy, the wild, was brought by a shadow low
Into large quiet Mary queer girl, so
Startled, most delicate one, Mary
Forget the shadow love, the airy
Phantom, you sorrow

Sunlight buzzes in
An arch over your head, Halos spin
A ring of dancing atoms, pure and warm
And all invisible motes of being swarm
Around young wilful Mary raped
By a tall gay shadow, glory-shaped

Greater than death has happened to Mary, more
Terrible things than birth Heavy and lonely
Mary has lost her smile, Mary great
With load of man There is only

Agony to come, Mary, wait:
Only agony and another loss of your being.

Out of you, behold, in animal sorrow
The groan announcing a new, an angelic shadow
Who shall achieve the power and the glory

Lie down in the clover, Mary, mother of phantoms.

New York City
1926

Long Dialogue

One voice .

ENDURE the dark.
I have turned
You out on chaos .
My need is deep
To open to such comers on the earth
What is it then you envy so?
You who are nothing
Who might suddenly start
Up from my torpor, up from sleep

Enter not now, through me, into agony the narrow groove of
birth
Endure the dark
I have turned
You out on chaos
Enter not now, through me
Endure where
You are in darkness howling with the wind
And I with you, I limited, you blind

Elemental, pure,
Endure
Darkness and the terrible lust of speed
I move

On a firm planet, still, in me, the stream,
The precipice of space, the earth's groove

Endure the dark
Strangely, I endure
The nothingness of your—your
Unbodied being This insistent pain
Is mortal illness, being neither in
The glut of life or death, caught in meshes, given
Space still to turn
About a nothingness that in its time
Will have its atoms and its tiny suns

New Preston, Connecticut

1924

American Farm, 1934

SPACE is too full. Did nothing happen here?
Skin of poor life cast off These pods and shards
Rattle in the old house, rock with the old rocker,
Tick with the old clock, clutter the mantel.
Waste of disregarded trifles crooked as old crochet
On tabourets of wicker. Mute boredom of hoarding
Poor objects. These outlive water sluicing in cracks to join
The destroying river, the large Mississippi; or the tornado
Twisting dishes and beds and bird-cages into droppings of
cloud.

The hard odd thing surviving precariously, once of some
value

Brought home bright from the store in manila paper,
Now under the foot of the cow, caught in a crevice
One old shoe, feminine, rotted with damp, one worn tire,
Crop of tin cans, torn harness, nails, links of a chain,—
Edge of a dress, wrappings of contraceptives, trinkets,
Fans spread, sick pink, and a skillet full of mould,
Bottles in cobwebs, butter-nuts—and the copperheads,
Night-feeders, who run their evil bellies in and out
Weaving a fabric of limbo for the devil of limbo;
Droppings of swallows, baked mud of wasps, confetti
Of the mouse nest, ancient cow-dung frozen,
Jumble of items, lost from use, with rusty tools,
Calendars, apple-cores, white sick grasses, gear from the
stables,

Skull of a cow in the mud, with the stem of dead cabbage,
Part of the spine and the ribs, in the rot of swill mud. This
Array of limbo, once a part of swart labor, rusted now,
In every house, in every attic piled Oh palsied people!
Under the weeds of the outhouse something one never
Picks up or burns; flung away. Let it lie, let it bleach.
Ironie and sinister junk filling a corner If men vacate,
Prized or unprized, it jests with neglect.
Under the porch the kitten goes and returns,
Masked with small dirt Odd objects in sheds and shelves,
And the stale air of bed-rooms, stink of stained bureaus,
Flies buzzing in bottles, vocal tone of no meaning
No wonder our farms are dark and our dreams take these
shapes

Thistles mock all, growing out of rubbish
In a heap of broken glass with last year's soot
Implacable divine rubbish prevails Possessors of things
Look at the junk heap for an hour Gnarled idle hands
Find ticks in the pelt of the dog, turn over a plank
This parasite clutter invades sense and seems to breed
A like in our minds Wind, water, sun,—it survives.
The whole sad place scales to the thistle and petty litter
Neglect laughs in the fallen barns and the shutters broken
Hanging on a wailing hinge Generations of wind
Owe you obeisance You win No man will war with you
He has you in him; his hand trembles, he rights
The front acre while the wife tidies the parlour.
Economy, economy! Who'll till this land?

Jamasca, Vermont

1933

Evening Love-of-Self

*

"this profound turning away from life and from the world takes place on a large scale only in periods of social stagnation and despair"

—REBECCA PITTS
article in the *New Masses*

I

SHE did what you have done watched a still sunset
Unclouded and cool it went down, a simple sun
Saw absently where it went down, on the third hill-notch

Event of earth-mark on sun-shape, event of air
Folding in shades on shapes She loitered with dark
To see how it came, if she could It was easier

Not to move on, so she stood That gathered a sigh
Not knowing why, ineffectual she felt, human and crude
Then evening shaped and was single, like a picture

Autumn apple-green the skies again
Burned pale, after reds and summer pinks,
And plain trees stood in the reserved sky,
One noticeably black walnut, branched and nuted
Then the timid drop of a winter-star
Shook low, like dew distilled, distilled to pure
Light and evening shaped and was single, like a picture

Or so to the woman who stared, who drew it inward
It appeared,—as she looked, as she drew her breath,
As if by breathing deep she held it taut
And made it stay, and kept it light—her evening
Her evening ending, she to see it wane

Not knowing why, she stifled the next sigh
Just as she stifled many But this sigh seemed
The whole sigh she had in her, stale breath of long
Years without tears Cautiously she grew aware of pain,—
Old pain no nerve recorded until now
Because poor nerve was doped in duller pain

(Drain away, Evening, subterfuge of day-time,
Undull the sense until it whimpers out,
But rarely, rarely How shall we else endure?
Stupefy again, after the startled whimper,
With the affairs of busy brevity, daylight cares
We must remember our names, and the houses we sleep in)

She took the other step, one inch off centre
She chose, seduced from routine, from neglect and habit
To try the other way Not ours Her nature froze
Against us, our stupidity, our natural day
She went away In her middle years
One twist, to look at sunset, set her off
She had been quiet and dull too long, and now

And tears never; nothing so clean as tears; nothing so child-hearted.

But adult anger, brutal response to the plain facts about me)

Well, one more moment for waning day One more
To ease me against the kind of night to come.
Whisper of autumn grasses. The ragged earth,
Great slut, lovely, disheveled, old and innocent

In a luminous noose of trance she regarded the world
Day-sleep and winter-sleep and death·
Three trances to offset the level of toil—
The standard worn escapes given to men
As mark of the need to renew for better return,
These, yes Still she tarried, to try—
Escape like a frantic bat in greening light
Violence against everything in hodge-podge,
Boiled in her nerves I'll destroy
This glazed poor life, she raged Knock one hole in paper,
Somehow Let me out I must
You fiends and spirits, take me.

II

This evening after her moment with the sky,
She paused; delayed, looked down, to the unlike earth
Below the star—three hills, old arcs of darkness,
One on another falling with no rise; saw these,

Rolling beneath the lengthening light like waves:
Great waves washed in with three strokes of the mind—
(Short night, and longer winter, and great death)—
Set one behind the other with no day,
No lifetime of bright sense to space their dark,
Making a brightness on the floor of life
Equal in space to the height of dark impending
Now, in her trance that poised against these waves,
Snatched brightness rode in the evening and the air

But earth, great earth that never does dissolve
Held all the circumstance of life, death, fate and winter,
All the old forms of life, death, fate and winter
The composed picture broke with her breathing, died
She moved, released The three waves rose
Easily on the rim of sky impending
And not so lightly as the flowers droop
When the chemical joy of the sun is drained away,
But like those people in cities, fleshy and wan,
Where windows open on walls and walls hold windows
more,
In the small room, to blot the reeling mind,
Who click in anguish—twitching the light to darkness,
She cut the stream and turned to sudden darkness—
Darkness, the bliss of hate, frenzy of death

Sleep will not do Poor pallid, twitching sleep
Sleep was a crowded concourse of not wanted

Things, feelings, faces and broken plots.
Her hated self, her loved and hated self,
Better than sun, pure lavish, pouring joy
The evening hour indulged her, only evening,
With that nobility her genteel nature craved
Held her fair image—poetic semblances.
Adages, faint wisdom, piety and negation
So rarely clear, her world, so very rarely,—
Fogged and distracted often, this one evening,
Hung in the west, declared the world again,
In limpid light kindly to nerves and senses
She, lonely as all her kind had been in New England,
Gazed at the waning ray

With daylight she might turn a culprit stone
That had familiar imprint, loose a pang
Of prescience or worry when she looked
Out some unusual window (something there
On the black walnut limb Behold some dream)
Click, like a shutter click, inside a kodak, memory
Opened, re-saw, acknowledged, and shut again
So did the trance encroach on her living day

She fell to staring when her husband spoke
At knots in the grain of wood, at shapes, at figures
Made by the light on the floor After weeks of not seeing,
Seeing was sharp and tiny, wide as a knife-blade
She shook when she saw A cup or a dish

Queried or caught her eyes and she was quiet.
While time would tick in the room and a dangerous stillness
Froze the bright trees, shining in noon-day sun.
She was bothered as if by flies by a flutter of sight.

Often she stood and looked at a tree by inches,
Or the ground, a ditch, the empty clothes-line swing,
Anything, anything, empty as the swing
Of a slack line The worn place in the grass beneath the
swing
Of the rope—but the glimpse was gone and left her mockery
Of things Gone as finally as written lightning
Something seized, but gone Poor woman on
The track of a dream Lost in the grass In the sand
In the daylight In the bewildering brain

Then the eye began the tired business of noting but not seeing
So she employed her days Endured her nights Walked slight
and level

She said what others said, ate the same food, gestured
Nothing was about her Then after melancholy years
Once to stand in her faded dress consulting the sky
For omen of some sorrow not located in events called real . .
(This living like a creature in a shell
. . . To catch so many glimpses, to be
Alone in limbo! No neighborly fences
Across which to call or nod A surly gentlewoman
Wrong in the seed planted by a fore-father

Long ago as the gate-elm. A woman of New England
Living on a farm with a man who was no farmer.
No husband, said her face No farmer, said the land)

III

Whence was this guilt? This load of personal death, despair
spiritual?

Whence these bad dreams? Whence accusations, echoes,
absurd tremors?

Intimations of past things, visages of reproach, rage, horror.
None of these dwell in the estate of day, none of these come
advancing

Across the earth as it is, these things are secret, the discards
No horror in life reaches such over-tones, indeed any horror
Experienced, by the clock of life, must copulate with these,
Have traffic with these, before they know us and hurt us
Nothing in the genteel bare life this woman lived, gave covert
for such din

*How shall we argue with the very blood?
Or see clearly if the eye itself hold the enemy?
How shall the city stand that is already taken?
How dispel what is absorbed?*

Day was faint memory A fluid tinge At night
Her dreams in altered symbols hemmed her round
Not battles now, but hurts grotesque and homely

Nicked things cut in more real than their shapes by day.
Then dreams of plants gigantic, where she heard
The expanding leaf, the vein sluiced in with green,
Saw green in the dark, heard green, tasted, was
Her dreams grew close with folds and sheaths around her,
Like jungle shoots in swamps of noiseless leaves.
Her frantic mind remembered every night
What was not very evident all day
Until weariness, satiety, peace, dear peace, ensued

IV

On went the span of summer days and nights,
Widening leaves from the middle vein, rounding out crops,
Flavoring fruits from the centre, colored from the blossom-
end
Lifting the sunflower by invisible notches, daily, over the
woodshed,
Into a child's idea of a tree, into a giant flower,
With a face like a fringed pumpkin pie, composing juices
Dyed like a painter's, purple-carmen for the beet,
The grapes essential flavor from the bland soil

Blackberry vines grew through and around a skeleton
Sitting like a stiff doll on its haunch against a stone wall
All summer the fruit swung ripe before the eye-sockets
And at last fell in purple rot coloring the bones
Copperheads came out at night to feed, weaving

Their fish-bellies over and around the emerald, crisp,
Dew-littered stems—pronged tongues before, snake-naked;
A woodchuck sometimes came and sat up—plunged
Crows long ago had ceased to visit the old man.

And when she found this melodrama of bones,
She laughed Told no one Ran the whole way home
And that night had no dreams Death concise and belittled

The sunflower grew on enchanted by its lift
Out of a light seed planted
The thistles nodded,
The green grass smiled One lane into the neglected garden
One lane to the gate The pump-handle
Was up, for lack of pumping Some one read
Old magazines and letters in the attic

But still the spider ran along the silk
He perfectly had reeled out from his bowel,
And stung the blue bug once between the wings

Her eye went down two glints of spider web;
She came to see the affair midway She stooped
And saw a battle, enormous, upon gauze
The spider had him and he knew he had
He neared the bug and biffed it
The bug was like an oxen to an ant,
But still the spider ran along the silk

He perfectly had reeled out from his bowel,
And stung the blue bug once, between the wings,
Imprisoned, once under the leg that held him strung,
And once behind That put bug in a dope
Well, just once more, behind

Then, able nurse,
The active, tender spider bent above,
Dressed him in gauze, in bands of insect flax,
To hoist him on a lever, in the end,
To a stored nest, where baby spiders all
Dark winter long might have their blue-bug meat
Cadavers of four flies of different kinds
Wound up in mummy pomp, spider perfection,
Preserved by devilish art Lest they should die
And stink, they slumbered unconsumed

Well,
She thought in the sunlight that was shining like a madness,
Well, I like this better than dreams

The viscous green
Laughed for her, she was taciturn

She idled

The thing repeated . Out of the slimy Nile
The huge cows crept with St -John's-wort on their horns
And ate the lean cows, and came surging up
In a turgid river, twirling the house in eddies,
In whirls and eddies, their smooth backs running in currents
Where the cows leave their hardened droppings, next year

Will grow a coarser, greener and taller cone of grass, and the
enraged soul

Must take its scythe and cut the smothering tangle,
Lay waste the lush flat color of full summer
That grows into the air and lessens space
And binds the sky itself down with its glisten
Refracted from the poison of its surface
That slides, and is so evil in its glisten
If you go on, my soul, in this broad-leaved acre
Your fingers will sprout leaves between the digits

In dread recoil with her soul in her hand she waited
Watching things out of dark eyes Something fastidious
shook

In her pulse, to call her to her sanity again
But was soul sanity, or did denial alone save her?
She told herself in the face of all warm beauty
Be sure to watch the edges where the pests
Hatch in small bags of cottony cocoons Fear thistles

V

So for a season in the house she murmured
In a dull maze

He was too bound to the crops
Which spoiled, this side of harvest, every time,
While all around the rank weed, and the rough grass
Rose on the air in waves of vegetable silk—

He was too baffled by crops, and their routine
To think of thistle crops, or wait on her soul,
Or put his ear to her heart, or kiss her mouth.

I am tired, so tired of being a person,
—One person and another and another
With spiritual colors in my shifting mind,
With spiritual needs that make me grow like a thistle
Shadows cross my eyes that change the inner,
And hence the outer world Morbidity my talent'
I do not want to live in one small fester
Or dwell upon the fortunes of my spirit,
Holding my pulse, and helping my sickness on

If earth's my home and I am only dust
As I believe, and soul a sort of illness,
I'll come to dust before my date with death
Despite this trembling worry of short years,
I'll live by the rote of my second sight in dreams,
And beat the process of a tranced decay
By fixing all my might in the zone of things
I'll use this giant power of bad will
Until I wear it limp or wreck my world
I must succeed or cease, die, die, die, if need,
But in mighty satisfaction, myself, alone

She stared at stars while pumping water, moved
Over thick grass in twilight with slow noise,

These feed on some unseen and chemical
Fond goodness in this loam of many dead
To flourish a nettle world not well contrived
For your unstable units, women and men

Death furrowed land, the day said, when she paused
To look across the valley—hanging clothes,—lovely
Individual air, and the depth above the head
Black—sprinkled small at night, and in the daytime,
Air, tall in the eternal emptiness of light .
With only the lone sun individual, superb,
Alight in this most single-minded land,
To keep the mind from thinking without hub,
To keep the vague soul fastened unforgetful
On one persistent blaze that will not hurry,
That can not be denied or made completely,
By this monotony, so great it is,

monotonous in time . . .

Twice

He found her crying and would stump
In his thick boots outside to weed her garden,
Or turn new hay in silence all the pale evening
And come in like a stone man, without light,
When she was surely dignified in sleep

Voice like light chiming, motes of pure silver,
Lonely and superb, inexhaustible as light . . . voice pleaded,
She slept with unstopped ear, heard serene song·

What is pure cannot be destroyed, destruction is only
Breaking what is corrupt into units of purity
Look at the litter now, and wait, the green corruption
Will work on itself; break down, become simple
That new rare object, that marvel of our living,
The created thing that is pure, that is hard-simple,
The song, the poem, power, living, apparent—
This inhabits the air; it dies not, unseen and unheard
Except by those few who hear, intent beyond self

How arrange refrain, mute, meaningless, sleep-folded?

O Death, since I have known you so, forget me,
Since I have burrowed past your three dark hills, forget me,
For I am far from ripe for your cold plunder,
And colder now than even death could make me,
Chilled with a mind that would not wait its time
But ran out to the stars in the wild cold,
Killed, numbed by curiosity, now like a hibernating snake
But I have found the secrets hidden past you—
Beneath your surface gone, and come again

I am your child Now let me watch your children
Who know no reason for their hands and feet,
Who toss and curse and only stun their eyes
With looking with the idiot's smile at the green moon

Tell me, will some one, why the heart
Aches as it walks this planet, why the eyes
So prone to error, still see in the end and never
See what the heart has named for its own glory.
Slowly made aware by years and years of dark,
The anxious eyes, the eyes grown wide and honest,
See in the end this rigid grief, this medusa—
So hard it is, so sad, the outstretched hand
Jerks back before it!

Try, tired mind,
To learn your winter lesson, given each year,
See patterned earth not as the crows
Have seen, who pierce the rigid air,
But with the sun who is all glowing eye,
Or with the clouds who are one white, who glide
Over the vast, unstormed, untroubled one
Low moulded ridge
With its small black ravines
And little twists of river water in
The contour of the bottom meadow land

Or with an insect's eye
View this calm world, grass blade by farther blade,
And every carmine bug the size of salt,
The glassy angular grain in the variegated dust,
And ribboned straw, black tubes and hollow stems,
Thresholds of houses, rotting splintered planks,

Where nets of flies crawl under tiny roofs
And follow with an insect's little ear
The voices boring in the helms of wood

And then return, as you must, with metaphors in store
To the metaphysical house of many, many mansions—
Its rooms of glass, its microscopes, its pain,
Its trumpets of sound, announcing loud, The Soul
Take up the inquiry, invoke the golden hope
But see beneath the thicket of Time's leaves,
Beneath the multiplication in all change
These sober shapes, deathless simplicities

VII

New England nights are pale with chilly stars,
The incessant sound of insect pain prevails
And here the heart may break in substance thin,—
The earth meanwhile so steeped in starlit sleep,
The heart may break as slowly as it will

May break transfixed on outward things, on twigs
Budded, dressed in small leaves, may break in the absence
Of all attention, may break and lie in a swoon of little
sounds

After velvet hours while only toads
Quanked away in faint darkness, while the elms

Hung like a spray of greater darkness, there,
She woke from one reverie and thought along
The edge of her precipice-mind Before death's date
I have my dusty darkness, I have my death, I drag
Things into the daylight and keep them alive, I know
How to see figures in the twisting air I have
Tapped death, tapped the state I choose forever.
Hour when sun sets is victory, the shine
Of green evening, of the bleeding sun departing . .
Already I wait with the shades that delight in his going

She on the house-step sitting heard a note
Up the long road of dust and heavy trees,
His whistle so serene and solitary,
To tell her that she amplified her life
Past honesty or nature He whistled softly
Thinking she did not hear It told the mood of his coming
Under the icy stars, the late stars that summer
In all its bloom and rustle, all its pipe
Of tiny crickets and its summer smells
Never could color, tint or wash with sound,
So icy pure and clean of pregnant fault
Above the mighty stillness of thick leaves

Then when he ceased to whistle on the slope,
And became a shadow nearer, nearer merging,
She felt the first, last, only desire, to escape

This monstrous love, with early hatred schooled: —
With mingled glance, to imitate, to know
So well the habits of the hands, the eyes . . .
His touch with trifles, way of mood and mind . . .
I cannot choose but shape myself to him.
Sharing a roof, sharing a bed, sharing
Food is insidious, is a sad communion, we follow paths
Above the house, sitting or standing, we imply our union.

This our mutual gliding, murmuring, mimicking
Manner pulls us into warmth, into necessity
With each other When he is near I swim against his side
With no wish Some influence ties us in
Familiar-strange, he is, too, too familiar
He shocks me with his face, too, too familiar
Is it my face, face of my family? It rises
Like a stone image I stare at, keeping me
Within the circle of its thinking eyes
Oh, face too near, draw back a little now
O who is he, this self, this intimate stranger?
These hands of his, I mix them with my hands,
And which are mine? and where am I, I wonder?
Sometimes I fancy that I sit behind
His eyes in his brain, I peer and squint
Out of his eyes at myself I know the way
His hands will always gesture, out and down,
The thumb is like myself; and the forefinger
Something I dreamed God pointed at me once.

They fascinate my eyes, his hands, his palms
Always replying by echoing themselves

And something past the face—a constant burning
That comes too close, that will not quite come, still . . .
This is the great perversion—called the experience
Of love Oh, monstrous love Oh, monstrous . . .
Lost in the object, killed by too perfect nearness
With the remote man I'll not share darkness with him
May he die in the sun.

*I hate my soul until I think he steals it
I hate the sun until he spreads his hands.
I hate the darkness for his sometimes love*

O evening dank, ache of the sense, O last despair,
When we with the bats spread out our uncrinkling wings,
And flit, and wait, and grieve, and attempt to die

*She did what you have done· watched a still sunset.
Saw absently where it went down, a simple sun.
Her evening ending—she to see it wane*

*New Preston, 1927
New York City, 1928
Cornwall-on-Hudson, 1928
Mallorca, 1932
Bennington, 1934*

Poem About Money

I

POET, turn the page,
Read of another age

An age of bronze and brass
In paragraph compass

After the page, the thing
The little hard object sing

Enlarge the bronze and learn
The face of your concern

How like, how like our own!
Dug from the ruin of stone

Medallion, a mere dime,
Fragment minted for time .

Time's force nobody saw
Impervious as law

With economic ill
Joined lustily to kill

This age—its round and large
Indifference to charge.

It, dying here interred;
Money's image and word

II

The penny of wine and oil,
Old index of crude toil,

Money's round image and
Mock of the dirty hand,

Filed down and wedged between
Rings YES on the slot-machine

Through twenty hundred years
Work in this bronze inheres

Inheres—still the thing's a slug,
Archeologist's hum-bug

Whereas this current evil
Invention of the devil

Honest with sweat and new
Rings on the counter true

(While the banker for his barter
Plugs lead in the widow's quarter)

Still its cash, cold cash and strange
From bright arteries of exchange

III

Poet, turn the page
Read of another age

An age not yet extant
Up Time's slow climbing slant.

After the page, the thing,
The little hard object sing

The small and large of wage·
Resplendent new image.

In place of penny-ill:
Face of the athlete will

Rimmed, minted round the edge
Money's valor and pledge:

*He who will not work,
He who hopes to shirk,*

*He who hopes to cheat,
Neither shall he eat.*

*New York City
1936*

Four Frescoes for the Future

MULTITUDE and no tumult a maze on march,
Slow march, strong body and heart bowed down,
And head bowed down to the solitude of the dead,
Brutish grief down trodden under march of feet,
Death put down with the dead, and grief put down . . .

Then an end, an end to this Say enough, return
Nourish, tend, to work, to shop, return
In the name of the living, in the name of our span

Multitude and no tumult, sweet gusts of song
Floating, delirious hope, pure notes, so sing
Song, chiming and climbing chain As no one sang
Alone, aloft in the old days This chant our lore
Our love, our will, our bold blithe gale of sound .

Then an end, an end to this, singing, return
Nourish, tend, to work, to shop, return
In the name of the living, in the name of our span

Multitude and no tumult galleries intent—
Men in great congress, active in applause,
The agile argues, the logical man again
Utters, exhorts, expands and again expounds,
Pauses Applause O orator, reply!

Then an end, an end to this; disperse, return.
Nourish, tend, to work, to shop, return
In the name of the living, in the name of our span.

Multitude and no tumult Long frolic lines,
O garetty of wind, child flung in foam to swim
Races and feats, games, parachutes, flags;
Roar for the athlete trim and brown as bronze,
O festivals, O spectacles, enchant, enchant—encore!

Then an end, an end to this. Pick up, go home
Nourish, tend, to work, to shop, return
In the name of the living In the name of our span

Bennington, Vermont

1934

Silence in Mallorca

I

OUR stony island, Spain's laconic child
Quiet. Nada. Cover the glowing spark
Hush all the hótas and hush hush the wild

Arabian cries Now in Europe's dark
Whisper weep secretly plot but never sing
On cliffs against the sky moves the new mark

Shape of the plane, the loathed imperial thing
The hawk from Italy, the spy of black
Ground where we labor darkens with its wing

A few shot first Then nothing Then the attack
Terror of the invader Puff of shells,
And Juan our best man ambushed in the back

Hide hide in the caves, listen in the dry wells
Clang—the obedient treachery of church bells

II

They shot the mayor of Inca. They jailed
The poor the free the poor the free the brave
Out of the puerto when the felucca sailed

Planes roared and swooped and shot them on the wave
Our people serve the invader and his gun.
Our people, Spain Slow tempo of the slave

We are cut off Africa's blazing sun
Knew these same hawks that now around us prey.
And Barcelona suffers Is there no one

To save us but ourselves? From far away
After victorious battle Cry, we cry
Brothers, Comrades help us Where are they?

Our island lying open to the sky
Mallorca, the first to fall, the last to die

III

O wild west wind Liberty's open roar,
Blow on this island, blow the ocean clean,
Drown our tormentors, blow equinox, blow war

Away from the world Drive to us the unseen
Battalions, clouds of planes by workers flown,
Give us our land again, quiet and green,

Our children singing and our land, our own
Ways, our wives, our delegates Blow here
The indifferent sea washes the beach of stone,

And Mediterranean silence, primitive fear
Steps in the foot of Tomàs, the new slave.
Moves in the hovering hawk, spiraling near

We bend, we work,—this island inferno and grave.
Come with the wind of your wings. And save

New York City

1938

Funeral in May

A POET suddenly cried
Metaphor metaphor why hast thou forsaken me.
Lightly came a taunt from the crowd
Lo the poor poet!
But the offended voice amplified
opened the stops
continued splendid with echo:
The enigmatic certainty that opens in Art like a flower
Is the true worship of God,
All else is barbarism
On God we poets depend for being.
On him all structures rely
all metaphors hang
He our source center only energy eternal
Upon which in words in pigment and in sound
We arrange the experience of living
a bright a gaudy decoration
a sharp discord.
Ever since my last nervous breakdown I have known this to
be true.
We the mouthpiece of the divine
we who have the art to breathe with his breathing
Whose deft fingers play the mass
feet poised on the pedals
Whose arms swing in the arc of the mural
whose voice starts from the throat in gold song

In the breathing peace of the Lord;
We the loud affirmation
The long yea and amen tranquil in unison . . .
Nevertheless my eyes fail
perhaps my verses are bad
Try as I may God eludes me.
Still my taste is of the best
no one could be better equipped . . .
Somehow we must stand for the eternal
the august
in the midst of crude wars
Mysticism is a great comfort
The mystics use symbols . . .
Not all the gold metaphor of the Roman angels is half so
wrong
Not even the baroque image
so wrong as this
to be literal literal Alas
Lovely metaphor redeem me from sin
and deliver us from meaning
Then he died
snap like any business man
worry overstrain
burst a blood vessel
Bury the poet deep in his words came the voice of the infidel
He will agonize no more
Pick flowers without scent for his grave.
There he lies
Silly boy

So dies the copy of God. He was never happy.
God the grandiose image mocked his wits in all mirrors
Where he loved to indulge in the anxious close up
the smile
the grimace
and the wince

A galahad of grace sustained by six percent in his hey-day
Scoop his grave with the jolly steam shovel
One scoop will do

Turn funeral to fete
Carry the effigy off
Burn the straw puppet

A hollow doll made by the rasp of dry words
Time now to bury the barbaric thing Or deck it with lilacs
Faded full of rain smelling of ruin
And for the grave-going poet

Take from the darkened room the ghost-haunted glass—
Give him this mark for his grave Set here for his grave-stone
His perfect companion the mirror Put it here out of doors
In its blank write his epitaph out *Newsreel our day*
Let windy leaves toss in its flash
When we gather fresh laurels

Blow blasts on the factory whistle Ring loud early bells
Dance in the meadows
young and old
stalwart and swarthy

Turn funeral to fete.

Here we inter folly

Gluttonous villiany stupidity the vanity of man.

Again and again we must dance on the grave of this death

Beating down with determined feet what is already dead,

Weeds growing here will wear to rags where we step

Dance

it is May

of all Mays the gayest with promise

You who are skilled with the songs lead the way with your

singing.

Jamasca, Vermont

1934

Lark

O LARK, from great dark, arise!
O, lark of light,
O, Lightness like a spark,
Shock ears and stun our eyes
Singing the day-rise, the day-rise, the great day-rise.

O Believer, Rejoicer, say
Before Evidence of Day
The Sun is Risen. Where
No sun is, come loudly in the air,
Let ear and eye prepare
To see and hear, truly to see and hear,
To hear thy three-fold welcome in the air,
To see all dazzle after long despair,
To see what none may see now, Singer, Singer fair, so fair.

O, lark alert, O lark alive,
O lovely, lovely chanting arrow-lark,
Sprung like an arrow from the bow of dark,
O lark arise,
Sing the day-rise

The great day-rise

Mallorca
1932

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